

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

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FM USMISSION USBERLIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3052

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T USBERLIN 1868

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, US, JA, GW, WB

SUBJECT: DEFECTION OF SOVIET MIG-25 PILOT--OLD CASE OF SOVIET CRASH

REFS: (A) STATE 221006, (B) BONN 15000 NOTAL

1. SUMMARY: WE HAVE NO INFORMATION ON HANDLING OF PREVIOUS INCIDENTS DURING WHICH SOVIET OR OTHER WARSAW PACT MILITARY EQUIPMENT CAME INTO FRG HANDS. CLOSEST PARALLEL WE HAVE RECORDS ON IS CRASH OF SOPHISTICATED SOVIET MILITARY PLANE IN WEST BERLIN IN 1966. BRITISH, INTO WHOSE SECTOR PLANE CRASHED, TOOK LEAD IN FENDING OFF SOVIET DEMANDS FOR IMMEDIATE RETURN OF ALL WRECKAGE AND FOR PERMISSION FOR SOVIETS THEMSELVES TO PERFORM NECESSARY DREDGING AND RECOVERY OPERATIONS UNTIL U. . AND BRITISH INTELLIGENCE EXPERTS HAD COMPLETED THEIR INVESTIAGATIONS. MAIN PART OF WRECKAGE WAS RETURNED AFTER WEEK AND ENGINES ONLY AFTER NEARLY FOUR WEEKS HAD PASSED. CERTAIN SENSITIVE RADAR AND ELECTRONIC COUNTERMEASURES EQUIPMENT WAS APPARENTLY RETAINED BY BRITISH WHO NONETHELESS REJECTED U.S. PROPOSALS THAT ENGINES BE FLOWN TO UK OR US FOR MORE EXTENSIVE LABORATORY TESTS AND IF
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NECESSARY NOT TURNED BACK TO SOVIETS. END SUMMARY.

2. YAK-28 FIREBAR, THEN ONE OF NEWEST AND MOST SOPHISTICATED SOVIET MILITARY PLANES, CRASHED INTO

STOESSENSEE LAKE IN BRITISH SECTOR OF BERLIN AFTERNOON OF APRIL 6, 1966. BRITISH IMMEDIATELY CORDONED OFF AREA WITH THEIR TROOPS AND UTILIZED BERLIN POLICE DIVERS TO INVESTIGATE WRECKAGE WHICH WAS PARTIALLY SUBMERGED IN SOME FIVE METERS OF WATER. SOVIETS, IN VIOLATION OF FOUR POWER UNDERSTANDINGS ON MOVEMENT OF TROOPS WITHIN CITY, DISPATCHED 20 ARMED SOLDIERS FROM THEIR WAR MEMORIAL IN WEST BERLIN TO SITE AND DEMANDED THROUGH BRITISH LIAISON MISSION AT POTSDAM (BRIXMIS) THAT THEY BE ALLOWED TO CONDUCT SALVAGE OPERATIONS THEMSELVES. BRITISH RESPONDED THAT IT WAS ALLIED RESPONSIBILITY, AND IN FIRST INSTANCE BRITISH OWN RESPONSIBILITY, TO INVESTIGATE INCIDENT THOROUGHLY AND TO TAKE ALL APPROPRIATE MEASURES. US REFUSED PASSAGE INTO WEST BERLIN AT CHECKPOINT CHARLIE OF SOVIET ARMY BUS WITH 14 OFFICERS AND TWO ENLISTED MEN UNTIL SOVIETS WITHDREW ARMED SOLDIERS FROM CRASH SITE. WITHIN NEXT 24 HOURS, SOVIETS ESCALATED THEIR DEMANDS TO EMBASSY LEVEL WITH APPROACH TO BRITISH MINISTER AND TO LEVEL OF COMMANDING GENERAL SOVIET FORCES GERMANY-CHIEF OF BRIXMIS. ALLIED AIR CONTROLLERS IN TURN PROTESTED IRRESPONSIBLE SOVIET FLIGHTS OVER WEST BERLIN TO SOVIET CHIEF CONTROLLER IN BERLIN AIR SAFETY CENTER (BASC). BRITISH INSISTED THAT THEY WOULD MAINTAIN FULL CONTROL OF INVESTIGATION AND SALVAGE AND EXTENDED CORDON AROUND SITE SO AS TO MAKE SOVIET OBSERVATION OF OPERATIONS MORE DIFFICULT.

3. DIVERS DISCOVERED BODIES OF TWO CREW MEMBERS IN WRECKAGE APRIL 7, AND BRITISH TURNED REMAINS OVER TO SOVIET HONOR GUARD THAT EVENING BUT ONLY AFTER REBUFFING SOVIET DEMAND THAT CEREMONY BE HELD ABOARD SALVAGE RAFT DIRECTLY ON SITE. BRITISH CARRIED OUT SALVAGE WITH LESS THAN EXTRAORDINARY SPEED IN ORDER TO PERMIT BRITISH AND US INTELLIGENCE SPECIALISTS TO COME TO BERLIN AND EXAMINE FINDINGS. RADAR AND OTHER ELECTRONIC GEAR OF PARTICULAR INTEREST WAS REMOVED FROM WRECKAGE INITIALLY TO BRITISH GATOW AIR BASE IN BERLIN AND THEN TO UK. BRITISH AND US
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SPECIALISTS CONDUCTED EXAMINATION OF FUSELAGE AND OTHER MAJOR PORTIONS OF PLANE FROM SALVAGE RAFT WHILE FACADE OF EXTENSIVE DIVING ACTIVITY WAS MAINTAINED AS COVER. BRITISH WERE PREPARED TO ADVISE SOVIETS THAT RECOVERED PORTIONS OF PLANE COULD BE RETURNED AS EARLY AS EVENING OF APRIL 8, BUT PUT THIS DATE OFF FURTHER DAY IN VIEW OF STRONG US PRESENTATION THAT MORE TIME WAS REQUIRED FOR EXPERTS TO COMPLETE THEIR EXAMINATION. ACTUAL TURNOVER OF WRECKAGE WAS DELAYED UNTIL APRIL 13. WHILE SOVIETS HAGGLED FOR FOUR DAYS INSISTING THAT BRITISH PROVIDE DETAILED ITEMIZATION AND GUARANTEE THAT NO PARTS STILL REMAINED TO BE SALVAGED. BRITISH FENDED OFF SOVIET DEMANDS SINCE ENGINES, WHICH THEY AND WE CONSIDERED

VITAL, HAD NOT YET BEEN LOCATED.

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4. SECOND PHASE OF SALVAGE, SEARCH FOR ENGINES, WAS
BEGUN APRIL 15. BRITISH CONTINUED CONSTANT DIALOGUE
WITH SOVIETS, MAINLY THROUGH MILITARY CHANNELS IN POTSDAM,
ON SOVIET DEMAND FOR RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN OR AT LEAST
OBSERVE SALVAGE CLOSE UP. FIRST ENGINE WAS LOCATED
APRIL 20, RAISED AND MOVED TO GATOW THAT NIGHT UNDER
COVER OF DARKNESS. SECOND ENGINE WAS LOCATED APRIL 25
AND RAISED TO BARGE AGAIN UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS.
BRITISH MAINTAINED SHOW OF FURTHER DIVING OPERATIONS IN
EFFORT TO DECEIVE SOVIET OFFICERS WHO CONTINUED TO MINITOR
OPERATIONS FROM DISTANCE. BRITISH AND US EXPERTS CARRIED
OUT EXTENSIVE OBSERVATIONS AND SUCH TESTS AS WERE POSSIBLE
ON BARGE AND IN LIMITED FACILITIES AVAILABLE AT GATOW.
US URGED THAT ONE OR BOTH ENGINES BE AIRLIFTED TO MORE
SPECIALIZED LABORTORY IN UK OR US FOR DISASSEMBLY AND
THOROUGH TESTING. BRITISH WAFFLED, ALLUDING TO CONTINUED
UNSPECIFIED SOVIET PRESSURE AND IMPLIED THREATS BEING
CONVEYED AT POLITICAL LEVEL PRESUMEDLY EITHER IN
LONDON OR MOSCOW. BRITISH ALSO ALLUDED TO COMMITMENT
THEY APPARENTLY MADE TO SOVIETS SHORTLY AFTER CRASH THAT
EVERYTHING FOUND IN WRECKAGE WOULD BE RETURNED. BRITISH
EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT TRACES OF TESTS DESIRED BY US
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WOULD BE APPARENT TO SOVIETS IF ENGINES WERE SUBSEQUENTLY
RETURNED AND THAT IT WOULD NOT BE BELIEVABLE TO CLAIM THAT

ENGINES COULD NOT BE FOUND IN LAKE. US MILITARY INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY'S COUNTERARGUMENT THAT SOVIETS WERE RETAINING WRECKAGE OF AMERICAN RB-66 THAT CRASHED IN EAST GERMANY AND HAD RECENTLY RETURNED WRECKAGE OF T-39 STRIPPED OF CLASSIFIED GEAR WERE APPARENTLY NOT PERSUASIVE, AND BRITISH ADVISED US END OF APRIL THAT FCO HAD MADE DECISION TO RETURN BOTH ENGINES TO SOVIETS AS SOON AS EXPERTS HAD DONE AS MUCH AS THEY COULD DO IN BERLIN. HANDOVER WAS ACCOMPLISHED MAY 2, BUT BRITISH APPARENTLY HUNG ONTO RADAR AND ELECTRONICS EQUIPMENT THAT WAS TAKEN OFF PLANE FIRST DAY.

5. FRENCH, INCIDENTALLY, PLAYED VERY MUTED ROLE. THEY ARGUED APRIL 6-7 FOR PROMPT RETURN OF ALL WRECKAGE, APPARENTLY WITHOUT INTELLIGENCE EXPLOITATION IF NECESSARY, BECAUSE OF CONCERN THAT SOVIETS MIGHT SERIOUSLY ESCALATE INCIDENT. THEREAFTER, BRITISH AND US KEPT FRENCH IN DARK ABOUT PACE OF SALVAGE OPERATIONS AND WORK OF INTELLIGENCE EXPERTS. AS LATE AS APRIL 27, FOR EXAMPLE, FRENCH HAD BEEN ADVISED ONLY THAT SINGLE ENGINE HAD BEEN LOCATED AND IMPRESSION WAS LEFT THAT THIS ENGINE WAS STILL AT BOTTOM OF LAKE. (INCIDENT OCCURRED, OF COURSE, DURING UNCERTAIN PERIOD OF FRENCH WITHDRAWAL FROM NATO MILITARY STRUCTURE.)

6. ONLY INDICATION OF FRG REACTION TO INCIDENT IS SUGGESTION IN SEVERAL MESSAGES THAT FRG WAS GREATLY INTERESTED IN RECEIVING RESULTS OF US-BRITISH INTELLIGENCE EVALUATIONS AND THAT BRITISH CONSIDERED THEY HAD " LIEN" ON INFORMATION BECAUSE OF EXCELLENT GERMAN COOPERATION (PRESUMABLY MEANING BERLIN POLICE) BRITISH HAD RECEIVED IN HANDLING WRECKAGE.

7. ABOVE DRAWN FROM RETRIEVABLE FILES UP TO AND INCLUDING SECRET CLASSIFICATION. OUR RECORDS REFERENCE DEPARTMENT TOP SECRET MESSAGES 570 AND 571 OF APRIL 30 AND MAY 1, 1966 PROVIDING SUMMARY OF LAST DAYS OF INCIDENT AS WELL AS TOP SECRET BONN EMBASSY MESSAGE 919 OF APRIL 30, 1966 IN ROGER CHANNEL. ONE OR MORE OF THESE MESSAGES WHICH WE NO LONGER HAVE MAY SHED ADDITIONAL LIGHT ON PRESSURE
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SOVIETS WERE ALLEGEDLY APPLYING TO BRITISH OR INDIAAE WHETHER SECRETARY OF STATE RUSK MADE PRESENTATION TO BRITISH AMBASSADOR ON POSSIBLE TRANSFER OF ENGINES OUT OF BERLIN WHICH HAD BEEN UNDER CONSIDERATION AS LATE AS APRIL 27.

8. A MORE RECENT AND ANALOGOUS CASE OCCURRED IN FRG ON MAY 26, 1973 WHEN SOVIET SUKHOI 7 CRASH LANDED ON AUTOBAHN BETWEEN BRAUNSCHWEIG AND HELMSTEDT. AFTER EXTENSIVE SOVIET PRESSURE, WHAT WAS LEFT OF AIRCRAFT WAS TURNED OVER TO SOVIETS IN A WEEK. ONLY BERLIN

INVOLVEMENT WE CAN TRACE WAS PRESSURE FROM GSFG'S
EXTERNAL RELATIONS BRANCH (SERB). EMBASSY BONN
PRESUMABLY HAS RECORDS ON THIS CASE.
GEORGE

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